



This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

- + *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
- + *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
- + *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
- + *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at <http://books.google.com/>



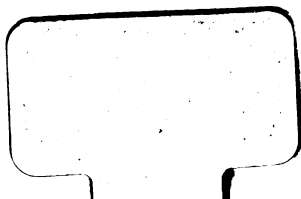
f.103



600091814T

50.1268

124 f. 103





•

•

INFIDELITY TESTED BY FACT:

A SERIES OF PAPERS,

REPRINTED FROM "THE CHURCH."

**BY THE
REV. S. MANNING.**

**LEEDS:
JOHN HEATON, 7, BRIGGATE;
LONDON: SIMPKIN, MARSHALL, & CO., ARTHUR HALL & CO.,
BENJAMIN L. GREEN.
—
M.DCCC.L.**



ADVERTISEMENT.

Whilst the following pages have been passing through the press, the attention of the writer has been directed to an Essay entitled, "Reason and Faith; their Conflicts and their Claims," in which the line of argument here pursued has been partially anticipated. Should these brief sketches fall into the hands of any who are not acquainted with that elaborate essay, he would recommend it to their notice, as one of the most valuable defences of the faith which has appeared since the days of Butler and Paley.

INFIDELITY TESTED BY FACT.

It is designed, in the following series of papers, to present, in a simple form, the argument for the historical truth of christianity, drawn from the acknowledged facts of secular history. The facts reasoned upon will be such that all persons may verify them for themselves; the evidence adduced such that all may test its truth. It is believed that each paper will afford a probability, more or less strong, that we are not following cunningly devised fables, and it is hoped that the cumulative force of the whole will shew the absurdity of infidelity, and the credulity of the infidel. The various arguments have no pretensions either to novelty or originality. All that has been attempted is simplicity, brevity, and directness.

No. I.

THE CHARACTER OF THE PERIOD IN WHICH CHRISTIANITY ORIGINATED.

It is an evident and undoubted fact, that, about the time when the Imperial power was established in Rome, another power sprang up alongside of it. Despicable at first, it soon gathered strength. A movement commenced, an impulse was given, which continues down even to our own day. Jesus of

Nazareth announced himself as the expected Messiah, and began to preach his gospel. Were his pretensions true or false? He was either an impostor, or a fanatic, or a prophet sent from God. Which?

In answering this question, it is most important to remember that there is no period of the world's history with which we are better acquainted than the one under review. We know the events which happened, and the modes of thought which prevailed, more accurately than those even of our own land prior to the use of printing. Its history is narrated to us by contemporaneous historians. Its mental and moral characteristics are most clearly reflected in the pages of its orators and poets. A century or two earlier or later, and we should be involved in much uncertainty; but this is just the point in which our knowledge of antiquity is concentrated as in a focus. This arises from the fact, that in no age, before or since (till the present), has mental activity been so widely diffused. The schools of philosophy, hitherto confined to one or two cities of Greece, were now established in almost every important town throughout the Roman world. The civil and military officers of Rome carried with them the literature and science of the metropolis to the remotest cities and provinces of the empire. Of that age and of this, it may emphatically be said, that "many run to and fro, and knowledge is increased."

It was, too, beyond all parallel, a sceptical and scoffing age. Not only were the current mythologies stripped of their antique grandeur and unsparingly satirized, but religious con-

victions of every kind were met by derision and scorn.* Neither the hoary magnificence of the Egyptian, nor the poetic beauty of the Grecian, nor the sublime, severe simplicity of the Jewish creed and worship, could gain reverence, or escape the derisive laugh of these scoffers. Even those who, with Plutarch, still clung fondly to the old beliefs, were compelled to give up their historic truth, and explain them into mystic allusions, allegories, and myths.

If, however, there was one religious profession which met with more unsparing contempt than another, it was the Jewish. Nation and worship alike were satirized and denounced. The Jew then, as now, was a by-word and reproach. Historian and poet combined to brand worship and worshipper with unutterable contempt and abhorrence. Of all the Provinces which the haughty Roman ruled, Judæa was perhaps the most despised, and, as far as the character of its people went, the most despicable.

Nor was Judæa itself exempt from the sceptical tendencies of the age. The old reverential spirit was gone. The deep sense of, and the firm faith in, the invisible, the infinite, the spiritual, which had characterized the nation in its better days, had now been exchanged either for a mere material, ceremonial worship, or else for utter infidelity. The Sadducees,

* A distinction important to be borne in mind in estimating the character of the period. Socrates and his school reprobated, indeed, the superstitions and mythologies then in vogue, but earnestly longed for a purer religious faith, and sought to extract one from the mass of error. The sceptical philosophy of the Augustan age, however, which culminated in Lucian, scoffed at and rejected religion in its essence.

denying angel, and spirit, and a future life, and the Pharisees, degrading religion into a round of external observances, divided between them the religion, or rather the irreligion, of the Jewish nation.

Now, was this an age in which an impostor or a fanatic could gain credence? Pretended miracles may attract disciples in an age of credulity and ignorance, and from among those classes who in every age are ignorant or credulous. It is conceivable enough how, in the dim twilight of a remote antiquity, or amid the darkness of the middle ages, men of like passions with ourselves should be invested by their admirers with supernatural attributes. Hence the gods of heathenism, and the demi-gods of the papacy. But is it possible that false pretensions to supernatural power could pass undetected and unrebuked in such an age as that? In darkness and solitude men may believe that they see apparitions—the obscurity invests objects, which are of the earth earthy, with mysterious and ghostly forms. But who has ever heard of an apparition in broad daylight, and in a crowded marketplace? Or who can conceive of the success of a false claimant of miraculous endowments in the light and bustle of the Augustan age? If the old religions,—sanctioned by authority and antiquity,—appealing to the national pride,—sympathizing with, and even growing out from, the national characteristics of the worshippers,—celebrated by all the genius of the heathen world, and adorned by all its arts,—consecrated by ten thousand associations of the past, and interwoven with all the political, civil, and domestic life of the present,—if reli-

gions thus sanctioned and supported could not *retain* their hold upon that incredulous age, because they could not stand the test to which they were exposed, is it probable that a new imposture could *gain* such a hold?

Add to this, that not only was the new faith without such sanctions and supports, but that it sprang from, and was promulgated by, the Jews—the despised and outcast race. *Their* incredulity must first have been imposed upon,—though all their prejudices were opposed to the innovations (those who believed, and those who disbelieved, the old religion, would alike be prejudiced against the new—the one from bigotry, the other from incredulity), and though all the means of disproof were at hand, for the events were said to have happened under their own eyes; and then, thus imposed upon themselves, they must set themselves to the seemingly impossible task of converting the contemptuous and scoffing Gentiles to faith in the imposture. Suppose a mission should arrive in England, announcing, as a teacher sent from God, a Hindoo who had suffered the death of a felon and a slave, would such an assertion be likely to meet with credence? would it not be met with derision? Still less likelihood would such a mission have of success, had it arrived in France during the universal Atheism of the first Revolution. Yet this is just a parallel case with the preaching of Jesus by the apostles, and such was just the treatment they received. Yet we find from the testimony of indifferent and hostile historians, writing contemporaneously with the events they narrate, that very speedily the world was filled with this doctrine; that there was no

province, no city, where there were not multitudes of believers. Within thirty-four years after the death of Jesus, a great multitude (*ingens multitudo*, *Tacitus*) were prepared to suffer death as the penalty of their belief in the crucified Nazarene.

Now, can this be accounted for on the supposition of fanaticism or imposture? With such ample means at hand for the detection of an imposture, how could so incredulous an age have been so grossly imposed upon? Even on the supposition that the power of the truth overcame prejudice and convinced unbelief, this is the most wonderful event in the world's history. On the supposition of falsehood and attempted deception, it is utterly inexplicable. It would present to us a miracle greater than any the bible records. Nay, more than a miracle, an impossibility. In all scriptural miracles, we have a sufficient cause presupposed—the intervention of divine power to change the order of nature. But here the laws of mind are not only suspended, but even inverted, without any cause at all. *A sceptical and scoffing age is deceived and converted by a crucified Jewish impostor or fanatic!* The belief of such a prodigy we leave for the amazing credulity of the infidel. A christian's capacity of belief is too narrow for the reception of such a marvel. We are too *incredulous* for that.

We are thus driven to the only other alternative—that the claims of Jesus were so manifestly true, that his enemies could not gainsay them.

No. II.

BEGINNING AT JERUSALEM.

It was noticed in our last paper, that the new doctrine commenced in Judæa. This is a point which deserves some attention. There is abundant evidence, so that the fact is undeniable, that immediately after the occurrence of the events narrated in the Gospels, certain Jews began in Judæa to preach the system of doctrines known as Christianity. Nor has the most daring of infidels, not even Strauss himself, ventured to deny that, very shortly after the execution of Jesus, his followers began at Jerusalem to assert, in proof of his Messiahship, that he had risen from the dead and ascended to heaven.

Now, see what is involved in this assertion. It was a charge of murder against the chief priests and rulers—murder of the blackest dye. For it was an assertion, that the man whom they had put to death on a false charge of blasphemy, had been declared innocent of the charge, by God himself reversing the sentence they had inflicted on him. Hence the language of the Sanhedrim, "Behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us." But it involved a yet more serious charge than this. It charged them with having contemptuously rejected and barbarously murdered the long-looked for Messiah, the hope and consolation of Israel; and thus bade them abandon all their hopes of national greatness, and involved them in the accumulated guilt of fighting against God himself.

Now, what would have been the conduct of impostors in such a case? Would they not most certainly have gone to some remote region, where the facts of the case were less notorious, and where there were no persons specially interested in convicting them of imposture? Or else, would they not have waited till the forgetfulness, or removal, or death of the parties implicated, had rendered disproof difficult? Such would inevitably have been the course of deceivers. But we find that they pursued no such course. At Jerusalem, on the very spot where these things were done, within sight of Calvary, where the cross, in all likelihood, still stood; whilst his blood was scarcely dried upon its stones, and whilst the events were yet fresh in every one's memories; face to face with the rabble who clamoured for his execution, and the rulers who instigated it, and the governor who gave him up to them, and the soldiers who executed him and guarded his tomb—there they boldly asserted that “him had God raised up whom they by wicked hands had crucified and slain.” Imposture, under such circumstances, could scarcely escape detection; yet even there they gained credence, and that so extensively, that Tacitus, a contemporary and hostile historian, tells us that “the sect, though repressed for a time, yet burst forth again, not through Judea only, but reached even Rome itself.” That impostors could thus have acted, or that imposture could thus have succeeded, is incredible. We can only account for their conduct and success by supposing that their assertions were indeed true.

No. III.

PERSECUTION.

In estimating the value of evidence in a court of justice, considerable importance is attached to its bearings on the personal interest of the witnesses. So that if, on the one hand, it can be shewn that they will be gainers by the evidence, its value is materially diminished; but if, on the other hand, it is proved that they bear witness in opposition to their own interests, it is proportionably increased. For, since men never tell falsehoods but from selfish considerations, if it can be proved that such do not exist, it is at once assumed that they have spoken the truth.

This principle of jurisprudence applies, in all its extent, to the character of the apostolic testimony. For they testified to the truth, not of doctrines, but of facts, of which they affirmed themselves to be eye-witnesses. The doctrines to be deduced from these facts, and to be proved by them, were an after consideration. The first point to be decided was simply the facts relating to the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. To the establishment of these facts their evidence was directed. These being proved, all the rest would naturally and necessarily follow. The simple question was, Did Jesus establish the truth of his Messiahship by his miracles and resurrection from the dead? All they had to do was to prove the facts. There is here no alternative between truth and wilful conscious imposture. Fanaticism might influence them in their doctrinal beliefs, but could not interfere with their evidence as to facts.

The ordinary laws of evidence will therefore apply to their testimony.

Is there, then, any circumstance which can give colour to the charge of imposture? Were they gainers by their evidence, so as to expose themselves to the suspicion of being false witnesses? The unvarying testimony of friend and foe alike proves, that the very reverse was the case. By testifying to the facts of the life of Jesus, they provoked the hostility of all the secular and all the ecclesiastical powers of the world. In their advocacy of this cause they suffered the loss of all things,—were forsaken and hated by their former friends,—stripped of their property,—deprived of their liberty,—denied the rights of freemen and citizens,—and, in the vast majority of cases, were put to death because they persisted in their evidence. The most unheard-of atrocities were perpetrated against them, to induce them to recant, but in vain; so that hostile eye-witnesses of their tortures were compelled to admire their firmness, and relent toward them. Let it be borne in mind, that the truth of these statements as to their sufferings, has never been so much as questioned. The utmost that the infidel has attempted to do, has been to lower the estimate of the numbers who thus suffered the extreme penalty of the Roman law.

Now, must not the evidence of men who would thus suffer rather than recant, be worthy of credence? The testimony of one such witness would suffice to demand belief; but that a band of men should be found who would live in poverty and contempt, and die in torture, to give currency to a wilful lie,

exceeds credibility. The attempts to crush the church at its outset, have only resulted in rendering the evidence in its favour irresistible. If, indeed, it could be proved that some considerable number, out of the many hundreds who suffered, had recanted under the influence of torture, even this would, upon the universally received laws of evidence, fail to overthrow the testimony of those who stood firm, though it might in some slight degree shake it. Or if it could be proved, that the facts had been denied at the time, and counter evidence adduced, some suspicion would be thrown on the testimony of these witnesses, though they sealed their testimony with their blood. But the fact is, that after the resurrection of Christ, no single instance of recantation by a professed eye-witness, and no attempt even at denial, far less at disproof, can be adduced. The unvarying obstinacy of christians under torture, and at the stake, passed into a proverb; and the bitterest enemies of christianity admitted the truth of the facts asserted, whilst, like some of the unbelieving spectators, they ascribed the miracles to magic and demoniacal influence.* Testimony thus unswervingly borne under the fiercest persecutions, and remaining uncontradicted, must surely be admitted as adequate proof of the facts alleged; for there is no other fact in history so strongly attested. If the gospel, therefore, be rejected as

* In proof of the first of these assertions every scholar will remember the passages in Tacitus, Juvenal, and Martial; and of the second, the allusions in the Talmud, Suetonius, and Pliny, and the direct assertions of Celsus, Porphyry, and Julian. An invaluable collection of passages from heathen writers bearing on this point will be found in Sheppard's *Divine Origin of Christianity*, vol. 2, pp. 110, 280.

false, all other history must go with it, and we are involved in universal scepticism and unbelief. If testimony is of any value whatever in proving the facts attested, those of the gospel must be admitted as proved.

No. IV.

UNIVERSALITY.

History shews that all schemes of philosophy and religion, save one, have been limited in their range of adaptation and design. However well suited they may have been to the people among whom they sprang up, they have never succeeded in adapting themselves to the ever varying conditions of human nature and society. What suited the philosophic Greek, was, on that very account, unsuited for the indolent Asiatic, the rude Barbarian, the practical Englishman. Each nation has had its own modes of thought and forms of belief, peculiar to itself and untransferable to any other. The only apparent exception to this is the Mohammedan creed. But though the range of this system has been somewhat wider than others, yet is it far from universal. It has never been able to exist except in a certain stage of mental, moral, and social development,—has never been able to push itself beyond certain boundaries. Mohammedanism in arctic regions is an absurdity, almost a contradiction.*

* It is a suggestive fact that Mohammedanism has never been able to gain any influence over the European mind at all. Though it established itself in Greece and Spain, and bore sway for many centuries in each, yet its votaries were, in both cases, confined to the Asiatic conquerors, and, in both cases, the conquered people retained their hatred of the foreign faith, and at last succeeded in emancipating themselves from its yoke. This is especially remarkable in the case of the Saracen empire in Spain, which, though mild, pacific, and prosperous, and though it maintained itself for seven hundred years, yet failed in subduing the faith of the native Spaniards, who, influenced mainly by religious considerations, succeeded at last in ejecting the

We find a similar contraction and exclusiveness in the great characters produced by these systems, in the examples which they hold up to admiration. We may admire, but we cannot imitate. To follow the example of the Greek or Roman patriot, we must recall the Greek or Roman society. Or if the example be imitable at all, it is only in a single point. No single model can be proposed for the imitation of all mankind under all possible circumstances.

Numerous instances in illustration and proof of this, will occur to every student of history. It is from this cause that every attempt to establish a universal empire has always, and every where, failed. External force may for a time compel various nations to submit to one central authority, one form of government, one code of laws; but the very moment that external force is withdrawn, the empire falls to pieces, and each nation, after whatever lapse of time, recurs to that form of government and life prompted by their own peculiar genius. English bayonets alone maintain the English government in India; and even our bayonets would fail to do that, were we to attempt to enforce upon the Hindoo our unmodified constitution and laws. The makers of new constitutions have generally fallen into this very natural error. Admiring the theory, or the working, of the government of some other country, they have sought to transfer it to their own; but the attempt has always, and signally, failed. They may *adapt*,

invaders. It may be fairly argued, too, that the degree in which Mohammedanism has succeeded in adapting itself to the various conditions of humanity, is attributable to its plagiarisms from christianity.

but cannot *adopt*: verifying the proverb, that "constitutions are not made, but grow."

The reason, the inevitableness, of this will be evident, if we reflect on the limits under which the mind of man acts. Each individual, each nation, has its own distinctive peculiarities, which mark it out from all others, and with which they cannot fully sympathize. Hence that which being perfectly in accordance with the distinctive peculiarities of one is therefore perfectly adapted to it, is, *on that very account*, but imperfectly adapted to all beside. The finite mind cannot embrace within itself, nor make provision for, the wants, the feelings, the circumstances, of the universal mind. A work can never exceed the capacities of its author. It must ever partake of his imperfections. Therefore, no system of religion or philosophy devised by man can meet the necessities of all men; no individual can become a perfect, all-sufficient model for the whole race.

There is, however, as we have intimated, one exception to this otherwise universal law. There is one system free from all such national restrictions, and which, whether true or false, has proved itself adapted to every condition of national existence, from the lowest to the highest. In every land, from the eternal snows of Greenland to the burning sands of Africa; in every stage of development, among the most barbarous and among the most civilized alike, it has triumphed; none are too highly civilized, none too deeply degraded, for it: and this it has effected not by raising or lowering its claims to meet their cases; for it inculcates upon all men, every where,

one simple unvarying standard of morals and system of truth, from which it never swerves by so much as a hair's-breadth. It everywhere teaches the same doctrines, speaks the same language, makes the same demands. And yet everywhere it has found acceptance. No despotism too severe, no democracy too free; no barbarism too degraded, no civilization too perfect, for it. In its diffusiveness it resembles the air, or the light. It can make itself a universal presence, unexcluded, and unaffected, by the ever varying circumstances of mankind.

It proposes, moreover, a model, an example of perfection, which is imitable by all men under all circumstances. In the character of Jesus which it depicts, there is that which appeals to the universal heart of man, which perfectly adapts itself to the ever varying conditions of humanity. The teaching and the example of a Jew who lived eighteen hundred years ago, have proved themselves applicable to every circumstance in the life of every individual who has lived since then.

Now this universality of adaptation, this independence of all national restrictions and limits, demands a cause adequate to its production. Could any individual mind have thus escaped from the limitations under which all other minds have acted? Could a Jew, one of the most bigoted, prejudiced, and national of men, have thus conformed himself to the universal mind? Is it conceivable that the ignorant and unlearned men, the fishermen and carpenters of Galilee, among whom the gospel notoriously originated, could thus have infinitely surpassed the achievements of all the sages of the world? To suppose that the founders of the christian church

were the unaided originators of the Gospel, is to confess them to be the most wonderful men our world has seen. If the truth of the gospel be denied, its invention must be accounted for. It must be explained how these Jewish peasants could devise such a system, and imagine such a character, as their simple and unaffected narrative presents. Every attempt to account for the production of the Gospel, on the assumption of its falsehood, will be found to be beset with insuperable difficulties, and to involve greater moral miracles, than any it records. The simplest, easiest, and the only adequate explanation of the case is, that these ignorant and unlearned men spake and acted under divine inspiration, and that the system they taught is the gift of the universal Father, and therefore adapted to the universal requirements of his creatures.

No. V.

CONTINUANCE.

In few points are the works of man more strikingly contrasted with the works of God, than in the evanescence of the one, and the permanence of the other. All the productions of man share in his own mutability. The earth is strewn thickly over with wrecks and ruins—the relics of bygone generations—the mementoes at once of their greatness and their feebleness. Mouldering heaps, shapeless, crumbling ruins, are all that now remain to us of the cities that once ruled the world.

“Assyria, Greece, Rome, Carthage, what are they?”

History is but the record of the rise, growth, and decay of nations and systems. Every empire has had its “Decline and Fall.” The same cause which forbids the universality, forbids too the perpetuity, of any system. For as no two nations, so no two generations, exactly resemble each other. Each has its own specific requirements and wants. Each generation must plan, speculate, legislate, for itself—under the conviction that its arrangements cannot long survive it.

How strikingly contrasted are the works of God! The same sun shines upon the crumbling mounds of Nineveh, as when Nineveh was an exceeding great city of three days’ journey, and is “as strong to run his race through the circuit of the heavens” as when its Creator first sent it “forth from its chambers.” The same sea laves the shores of Carthage as

when her galleys claimed for her the proud name of the Ocean Queen. The same stars look down on the Assyrian plains as when Abraham fed his flocks there. "Seed-time and harvest, summer and winter," have never failed since God made his covenant with Noah 4,000 years ago. Thus nature and history conspire to teach us the evanescence of human, the permanence of Divine, arrangements and laws. That which is of man always comes to nought of itself. That which is of God remains immutable and immortal amid the surrounding mortality, till He who instituted, sees fit to abrogate, it.

Now, does not the Gospel possess this characteristic of divinity? How many generations of systems has it out-lived? Yet it shews no signs of declining age. Buddhism and Mohammedanism have come into existence since its establishment, and have long been stricken with imbecility and dotage. The energy of their youth is departed, and their impotence invites assault. They belong to a bygone age, and are anachronisms in the nineteenth century. The carpenter of Nazareth and the fishermen of Galilee, however, established a system which retains its native vigour unimpaired by time. The revival of religion at the close of the last century, and the establishment of so many societies for its extension, prove this. Could an out-worn system have given birth to the Bible, the Tract, the Missionary Societies? Could a lie, a hollow delusion, a sham, have existed for eighteen centuries without being worn out? All history, all experience, all reason, prove that it could not.

We take a higher stand. We say that not only does the Gospel, after the lapse of so many centuries, retain enough of vitality to inspire the energies and meet the wants of the age—not only is it still unexhausted, but it is still in advance of the nineteenth century, as it was of the first. What are the great philanthropic schemes of the age, but a practical application of those principles which Jesus and the apostles first asserted eighteen hundred years ago, and which the gospel has been reiterating ever since—the reign of universal peace—the practice of self-denial and temperance, for the sake of example—the entire freedom of conscience from all human interference and control—the dignity of the *individual man*, apart from all considerations of social rank. Such are the aspirations and aims of the movement party, both in politics and philanthropy, and they are hailed and applauded as novelties. Yet we have in our hands a book written sixty generations ago, in which these principles are asserted and these practices enjoined—a book, be it remembered, written, not in Greece or Rome by profound students of human nature and national polity, but by obscure and illiterate Jews, toiling for their daily bread.

If these Jewish writers had outlived the sixty generations which have lived and died between themselves and us, we should at once be sure that their longevity was *supernatural*. This conviction would be strengthened and confirmed, if we observed that they shewed no signs of age or approaching decay. But, as we have seen, all human productions are as mortal as their authors. How, then, can we otherwise, or

more easily account for the perpetuation, and the perpetual adaptation of the system which they established, than by admitting that this is supernatural too? Does it not, at least, afford a strong presumption in favour of its divinity, when we see that, like the other works of God, it remains unchangeable, amid surrounding changes,—unfading and immortal, in a world of mortality and decay!

No. VI.

INFIDELITY.

The argument of our last paper is strengthened and confirmed by the fact, that Christianity has, in every age, been assailed by infidelity, and beset with corruptions. Partly from its requirements being such as man is indisposed to yield to, and partly from the corruptions with which its purity has been associated and sullied, there have always existed persons who have discredited its claims to divinity. Infidelity is no modern production, but is contemporaneous with Christianity itself. Christianity still exists, not because it is unassailed, but in spite of opposition. If infidelity were something new, if hitherto our faith had been an unquestioning and unquestioned credulity, which had now, for the first time, to endure the searching eye of hostile criticism,—if we were now “set for the defence of the gospel,” with arguments untested by assault, then we might feel some anxiety for the result. But when eighteen centuries of almost ceaseless opposition have failed to prove it “a cunningly devised fable,”—when the citadel in which we have entrenched ourselves has held out so long, we need scarcely fear. If the gospel be false, why has it not long ago taken its place among the other exploded errors of the age in which it was itself born? Why has not infidelity long ago triumphed over this, as it has over other systems of falsehood and delusion? They, as we have seen, died out in the natural course of things, though unattacked. This has shewn sufficient vitality to survive them, though ex-

posed to ceaseless assaults. Its very existence in the world, after so long a period of conflict, furnishes no despicable argument in its favour.

Again, not only the *fact*, but the very *forms*, of infidelity are all old. Almost every objection which has been brought against the truth of the Gospel, was brought during the first three hundred years of its existence, and was then replied to. Fifteen centuries have only witnessed a revival and repetition of the old arguments against it, and a constant accumulation of arguments in its favour.* The quiver of the infidel was soon exhausted against this adamant rock.

"The infidel has shot his headless darts away,
Then gleaned his blunted shafts, and aimed again."

It is, indeed, just possible that some fresh weapon may yet be forged, that some fresh mode of assault may yet be discovered; but it must be admitted, that the experience of eighteen centuries affords a strong presumption against its being successful. Some fresh antagonist may possibly detect the lurking fallacy and falsehood of the gospel; but, as sixty generations have failed, we may confidently await the issue, and our opponents must themselves confess that the probabilities are in our favour.

Again, in the very nature of the attacks made by infidels on christianity, there is an acknowledgment of weakness and

* Let it be borne in mind that we are speaking of the system of Christianity, not of Judaism—are defending the gospel simply. The infidel objections of modern science apply solely to the Old Testament.

timidity. No sceptical writer has ever taken the great facts of the history of Christ as the objects of his assault. He has always selected some unimportant particulars incidental to them; or else some corruption or perversion of them. Grant that the attempts thus made have been successful. What then? Does it follow that because these minute discrepancies, contradictions, and errors, are to be found, that therefore the main facts, against which no such charges are brought, are false too? The only inference which can be drawn from such a fact is, that the narrators of these events, like all other honest historians, were not anxious to make their narratives agree in these minutiae, but each stated that which he himself believed to be true, irrespectively of others; and this, so far from shaking their testimony, rather confirms it. Where the infidel has assailed the really important events in the life of Christ, he has been compelled to misrepresent them, or to draw his representation of them from corrupted sources. He perverts the gospel to suit his own purposes, and then boasts of his easy victory over it! The whole history of infidelity during eighteen hundred years, scarcely furnishes a single argument against the great central facts of christianity, as presented in the gospels. Does not the fact that the citadel remains, not only untaken, but almost unassailed, during so long a period, intimate the conviction of our opponents that it is impregnable?

Those objections of the infidel which have not been brought against the unimportant incidents and details of the gospel, have, for the most part, had as their object, some corrupted

form of christianity, in which it has been abused by selfish and wicked men to suit their own private ends. That the gospel has been thus abused we sorrowfully admit. It has been made subservient to the purposes of tyranny and priestcraft. Men have turned its liberty into licentiousness, and found excuse for sin in its abounding grace. But to prove the church corrupt is one thing, to prove the gospel false is another. Granting, as we do, that the religion of Christ has been so abused as to become the means of gratifying the lust of power, or of pleasure, does it follow that therefore the thing itself is false and evil? It rather proves that it must be true and divine, to have outlived such abuses, and borne up under such accumulated corruptions. Such gross superstitions, and accursed despotisms, could not have sheltered themselves under its sacred name, and reigned by arrogating to themselves its divine authority, if it had been as false and fallacious as is pretended. They, one by one, have died out, as all lies must die out; or been indignantly swept away, as all tyranny and fraud must be swept away. But this still remains, and has survived the wreck and ruin of all those systems of human polity and fraud with which it has been associated. The chemist knows that gold is unaffected by fire, because he finds that with whatever alloys he may debase it, whilst they are consumed in the furnace, it comes forth unchanged, save in its greater purity and fineness; their destruction, one after another, only proving its indestructibility. Just so the testing fires of infidelity, and the debasing alloys of superstition, by failing to destroy christianity, furnish fresh evidence for its inherent truth and divinity.

No. VII.

FLUCTUATIONS.

A sceptical reader of our two last papers would probably reply to them by pointing out the fluctuations to which the christian church has been liable. "See," he would say, "the steady and unchanging course of nature,—the ever varying course of man. Does not the history of the church partake of the latter rather than the former? Do we not find that in some nations and some ages the gospel has seemed to lose all power over men? Where, then, is that universal and perpetual adaptation you speak of?"

From this very objection our argument may be strengthened and sustained.

Let it be remarked, in the first place, that abstract essential truth is one thing, and that human conceptions and applications of that truth are another. The creeds and organizations in which men express their belief, and endeavour to extend it, may be, and often are, misrepresentations of the truth in its primitive simplicity. The failures of such a creed and organization to win credence, are chargeable, not upon the truth, but upon its misrepresentations. In the second place, it is for the gospel, not for the church, that we claim divine authority and infallible truth. The divinity of the gospel, and the fallibility of human nature, meet in the church. Its fluctuations and aberrations are due, we affirm, to the element we admit to be human, not to that which we claim to be divine. This may be illustrated by a supposed analogy drawn from nature. It

is quite conceivable that God might have created the sun, with adaptations to pursue its present regular course, and thus to light, warm, and fertilize the world, at the same time entrusting to men the power to regulate and control it. Now, it is evident that the selfishness, the pride, the ignorance, and the mutual jealousies of mankind, would cause the sun constantly to wander from, and fluctuate in, its course. The atheist might point to these aberrations as proof that the whole was a mere human contrivance of some bye-gone age; but if the deist could prove, that always when the sun was let alone to pursue its own course, and obey its own laws, all went on well, but that any interference, even by the wisest of men, always produced disturbance and injury, the argument would be as strong against the atheist as at first sight it appeared in his favour, and would suggest a very strong probability that *superhuman* wisdom launched it on its course "to give light by day." Just this evidence have we of the divine truth, wisdom, and adaptation of the gospel. Men, unable to appreciate its absolute perfection, its infinite excellence, have endeavoured to amend it by additions and curtailments. Every such alteration has been invariably attended by a corresponding loss of power and efficiency. They have attempted to adapt it to the ignorance or the philosophy of the age, but a wide-spread infidelity has been the result of their endeavours. Wherever and whenever we find that the gospel has lost its hold upon the hearts, and its influence over the lives of men, we also find that this has been preceded by human additions to, or abstractions from, its simplicity and integrity; and, on

the other hand, wherever we see a revival of religious faith and feeling, it has been as invariably preceded by a recurrence to the simplicity of the gospel. The ecclesiastical history of every age of the christian church, and the aspect of every region of christendom at the present day, afford illustrations and confirmations of this truth. Given the amount of infidelity in any country or any age, you may know the amount of the previous infringements upon the gospel. Given the amount of infringements upon the authority of gospel, you may know the amount of the consequent infidelity.

We are thus met by this extraordinary fact, that, in every age, the doctrines first promulgated by Galileans long before, have more influence over the mind of that age, than any which it can produce for itself,—that any attempt to alter, and amend, and modernize these doctrines, is always attended with a diminution of their power,—that a return to these doctrines in their primitive simplicity, is always attended with a correspondent increase of their power. What are the almost inevitable inferences from this? We can scarcely avoid the two following: 1st, That the fluctuations in the history of the church arise either from human depravity which hates, or human fallibility which distrusts, the power of the simple gospel, and which have led the church to make innovations upon that simplicity and integrity; and, 2nd, That a doctrine which has proved itself to be so entirely adapted to the conditions of every age, that every change has but diminished that adaptation, and every return to its simplicity has but increased it,—that such a doctrine must be divine.

There are two considerations connected with the subject of this paper, a full discussion of which would have extended it to too great length; we merely allude to them, therefore, leaving the reader to expand and develop them for himself. 1st, Is not the inherent vitality, the essential truth, of the christian religion proved by its power of resuscitation? Can we conceive of an obsolete fiction which has fallen into contempt and rejection, reviving, in the progress of civilization, so as again to become a living principle in the minds of men? 2nd, Can we account for the progressive and expansive power which christianity manifests at the present day, otherwise than by admitting that it possesses a principle of life and truth?

No. VIII.

PRACTICAL RESULTS.

If the design of this series of papers had been to examine Christianity as taught in the Gospels, and exemplified in the character of its Teacher, nothing could be more conclusive than a view of the practical results it is adapted to produce. Let it, on the one hand, be shewn what are the wants and necessities of humanity, and, on the other, let the most perfect ideal of man and of society which we can conceive be suggested, and it might easily be shewn that the principles and precepts of christianity, fully carried out, would meet all those wants, supply all those necessities, and bring about that state of perfection. But we have to do, not with the possible, but with the actual ascertained results of the christian system—*with the Gospel as it has acted through the Church in History*—a far more difficult and less satisfactory topic.

Let it be, in the first place, remembered, that no system can be justly held responsible for that which it denounces and condemns. This is so very obvious a truism, that the adducing it may raise a smile, but it is one constantly forgotten in the arguments of the Infidel. Wars and persecutions have been waged in the sacred name of religion, and professedly in behalf of Him who came to bring "peace on earth and good will among men." These things are not only opposed by the whole spirit of the gospel, but are explicitly condemned by its letter. Yet the infidel persists in charging these acts upon that system, whose social laws are summed up in one require-

ment—thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. As well might we charge darkness upon the sun, as hold the religion of Christ accountable for these deeds of bloodshed and crime.

Again, let it be borne in mind that nothing can be expected to act where it does not exist—that a cause can only be expected to produce results to the extent in which it is allowed to operate. The immorality and vice which yet pollute society, therefore, cannot be charged upon the gospel, unless it can be shewn that its principles exist, and are in active exercise, in the hearts of them that “do such things.” The infidel points to the conduct of those who call themselves christians just as they call themselves Englishmen, and he asks, What are they better than heathen? We reply, What are they more than heathen? The limited reception the gospel has met with, perfectly accounts for the smallness of the results it has produced.

In the third place, we remark, that in so far as the gospel has been allowed to act, its results have been wholly beneficial. Compare the condition of society in the present day, with that of nations who, without christianity, attained the very highest pitch of civilization. In them slavery existed to an extent of which we can form a very faint conception.* Nor was the propriety of slavery so much as questioned. It was assumed as the undoubted right of the conqueror to en-

* Attica, with a population of 528,000, contained 400,000 slaves. Other Grecian states were even worse.

slave the conquered. War was waged avowedly for purposes of aggrandisement, without even the pretence of justice or right. Infanticide was practised openly, whenever the maintenance of children became burdensome to the parents. Drunkenness, fornication, incest, and unnatural crimes, were scarcely deemed improper. Gladiatorial shows were the favourite amusement of the whole Roman people. Ladies of the highest rank and refinement looked on with intensest interest, as the arena streamed with the blood of dying combatants. The announcement that "christians were to be thrown to the lions," would fill the amphitheatre with all the wealth and fashion of Rome.* It has been shewn, by indubitable evidence, that the description given by Paul of his contemporaries in the 1st of Romans, is no exaggeration, but a plain literal statement of fact.† Now it must be admitted, that in all these respects, there has been an immense improvement, and that the improvement is still progressive, under the influence of Christianity. The evils have been either extirpated or greatly abated. Even where these vices hold their ground, they have become disgraceful. No one attempts to justify them. They shun publicity, and hide themselves from the light of day. It must be admitted too, that this advance is due solely to the influence of christianity. In these respects, the heathen world, so far from improving, had steadily grown worse. Many of these vices were not only committed by, but found their apologists,

* The Flavian Amphitheatre, which was frequently thus crowded, would accommodate 100,000 persons.

† See Tholuck on the Nature and Moral Influence of Heathenism.

and even advocates, among, the philosophers and moralists. Christianity stood alone in assailing and denouncing them.

Not only in the repression of vice, but in the production of the virtues and charities of life, are the practical results of Christianity to be traced. In the heathen world philanthropy—the love of man as man—was unknown. Virtue never took a wider flight than personal friendship or patriotism. An enterprise undertaken for the benefit of foreign nations was entirely unheard of prior to the time of Christianity. The spirit which prompted the apostolic missions was utterly alien to the thoughts and feelings even of the best of the heathen. Greece in her highest civilization, Rome in her utmost magnificence and wealth, did not contain a single alms-house or hospital; nor, in all their literature, can any trace be found of the spirit which now embodies itself in charitable institutions. In spite, then, of all the corruptions and perversions of the religion of the gospel, and notwithstanding the narrow limits within which it has been permitted to act, its results have still been incalculably, and are still progressively, valuable.

Take a map of the world, and single out those countries in which virtue most abounds, the amplest liberty is enjoyed, and where mental and moral excellence have attained their greatest height. How shall we explain the fact, that all these countries are just those in which the religion of the gospel is professed? That there is some connection between national greatness and the possession of the gospel, would seem evident from the facts of the case; and it matters little to our argument, whether it be ascribed to natural causes, or to the result of a

providential interposition. Or follow the christian missionary among the licentious Hindoos, the squalid Hottentots, the fierce New Zealanders, and account for the purity, the amiability, the civilization, which this religion produces among its converts from these various peoples. The infidel may sophistically evade the reasonings of a Butler, a Clarke, a Lardner; but, when he has done so, the irrefragable arguments of Williams's "Missionary Enterprises," and Moffat's "Labours in South Africa," remain.

In estimating the value of these practical results of the gospel, we must not forget that they are merely incidental to its great design. Its aim is to bring man into new relationships toward God and eternity. Its object is not civilization, social development, or political liberty, but these blessings follow in its train,—these flowers it scatters in our path, as it leads us on to glory, honour, and immortality. We point to these incidental results only as illustrations and proofs of its benign character. If, incidentally and indirectly, it has effected so much for mankind, have we not in this fact a guarantee that it can and will confer upon us those greater benefits which constitute its great business and aim?

We close this paper with a sentence from Baxter's Reasons for the Christian Religion—"If a deceiver might be the great renewer and sanctifier of the world, what possibility could there be of the discovery of that deceit? Or, rather, should we not say he was a *blessed deceiver* that had deceived us from sin and misery, and brought back our straying souls to God?"

No. IX.

SUMMARY.

The system of facts and doctrines, known as Christianity, claims to be at once true and divine. The object of the foregoing series of papers has been to bring these claims to a historical test,—to enquire whether the acknowledged facts of secular history confute or confirm these pretensions.

We found that the age when Christianity came into existence was one, with the events and characteristics of which we are perfectly familiar; and which was, beyond all parallel, unfavourable to the rise, and still more to the success, of such a system; being an age of all but universal infidelity. Still more unfavourable to its success were the circumstances of its Author and Hero,—a Jew, who had suffered capital punishment, in the form reserved only for the felon and the slave. Whilst the fact, that the persons, who first asserted that this Jewish malefactor came to establish the kingdom of Heaven upon earth, belonged to the same despised nation, would seem to render the success of their project morally impossible. Yet, in the course of a very few years, they had, by the use of moral means alone, and without the employment of force, overcome both infidelity and prejudice, and overrun the world with their doctrine. If we look more closely at the course pursued by these first preachers, their conduct and their success will, on the supposition of imposture, appear yet more inexplicable. It was not in a distant country, or after the lapse of years, that they claimed divine honours for their

Master ; but at the very spot and time at which the events referred to took place, and where they were perfectly notorious ; where detection would have been most easy, and imposture most difficult. Deceivers could scarcely have acted thus. Besides, no reason can be assigned why they should have attempted imposition in the matter. They gained nothing, and lost everything, by it. Their testimony exposed them to daily insult, outrage, and death. Immense numbers languished out their lives in dungeons, and expired at the stake, as the penalty of their, so called, obstinacy. Now, when we remember that there is not a particle of opposing evidence, can we do otherwise than admit that the facts thus attested are proved ? Arbitrarily to reject such testimony is to do violence to the laws of evidence—is irrational and absurd.

But Christianity consists of doctrines as well as facts,—or, in other words, the facts are said to embody and teach truths which, when received into the hearts of men, become so influential there, as to be worthy of a divine original. If we submit these doctrinal claims to the same historical test, we find that the truths embodied in the life, and taught in the ministry, of Christ, have shewn themselves to be adapted to the universal heart of man ; and that, under all forms of social development, and all degrees of mental and moral culture, they have actually exerted an influence unparalleled in the history of systems, and altogether unaccountable on the supposition that the writers of the gospel history were also its inventors. Its continuance, too, is not less marvellous and unprecedented than its universality. Its existence in the

world, as an influential system, so many ages after its promulgation, marks it out at once from all other creeds. They can boast of a duration approaching this, only among the stagnant nations of the East. Its continuance for eighteen centuries, through the fluctuations and storms of the Western world, amid which all other systems of philosophy and religion have been shipwrecked, is altogether without parallel. The difficulty of believing that a system of falsehood could have survived so long, is still further increased, as we observe that throughout the whole of that period it has been the object of ceaseless hostility and assault. It is scarcely credible that a fabulous legend, or a cunningly devised fable, could have outlived so long continued an attack. The unbeliever may, indeed, point to periods when his assaults upon it seem, for a time at least, to have triumphed. But the fact that such successes have only been gained over the gospel when perverted or obscured, and that every return to the purity of the gospel has always been attended with a revival of faith in it, turns the argument against the objector, and tends to prove that the system itself must be true and divine. This conclusion is still further confirmed by its happy influences, its beneficial results. It has civilized the savage, tamed the barbarian, purified the licentious, shewn itself the uncompromising foe of all vice and oppression, the unflinching advocate of liberty and virtue. If we are to test a tree by its fruits, and a system by its results, this last test must prove decisive of the question at issue.

The history of Christ and his apostles proves that they

could not have been impostors. The influence exerted by their teachings, in all countries, through all subsequent ages, proves that they could have been neither impostors nor fanatics. The only alternative left us, the only conclusion to which we can come, consistently with the facts of the case, is, that Christ was, as he claimed to be, a teacher sent from God, speaking the words of truth and life.







